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ABSTRACT

As academic libraries increase in size and become more complex, their organization tends to become more bureaucratic in nature and resistant to change. This paper describes a range of both internal and external strategies which have been used to introduce constructive change into the management of academic libraries in North America and the major consequences of the change which emphasizes: the need for particular ideas and resources; the effectiveness of several programs of collective management; the need for organizations to attain a certain level of development before successfully introducing major changes; the leadership requirements of the process; and the need for rational, effective staff involvement in the process. (Author/KKC)

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ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARY MANAGEMENT STUDIES
Duane E. Webster, Director

May 15, 1974

THE MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENT IN ACADEMIC LIBRARY PERFORMANCE

by

Duane Webster

Prepared for Presentation at the 1974 IFLA General Council Meeting

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As academic libraries increase in size and become more complex, their organizations tend to become more bureaucratic in nature and tend to resist change. This paper describes a range of both internal and external strategies which have been used to introduce constructive change into the management of academic libraries in North America, and discusses the major consequences of the change process. Finally, the paper presents a philosophy of organizational change which emphasizes: the need for particular ideas and resources; the effectiveness of several programs of collective management; the need for organizations to attain a certain level of development before successfully introducing major changes; the leadership requirements of the process; and the need for rational, effective staff involvement in the process.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As academic libraries increase in size and become more complex, their organizations tend to become more bureaucratic in nature. These academic library bureaucracies can be characterized as having isolated levels of organization, impersonal roles for staff members, centralized coordination and decision-making, and rigidly stratified authority and accountability. As a result, large library organizations tend to resist change and maintain a status quo. Faced with these static conditions academic library managers are seeking ways to maintain a posture of library program flexibility and responsiveness to changing environmental and social requirements.

II. METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUES OF CHANGE

A range of alternatives for introducing change into the operation and management of academic libraries is now available. For the purposes of this discussion they might be characterized as internal or external strategies.

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An example of external strategy is the use of consultants by the library. Consultants can provide useful, objective analyses of the library's problems while introducing fresh perspectives and new ideas and methods for improving the library operation. A number of recent experiences with consultants point out the potential value of this approach. For example, Columbia University in cooperation with the Council on Library Resources, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Research Libraries employed the management consulting firm, Booz, Allen and Hamilton to examine the operation of their research library with the intent of designing innovative patterns of organization and staffing for this institution.[1]

Another alternative that has become available for libraries is the use of certain change strategies developed for other enterprises and applied to libraries. For example, the American Management Association has a long-range planning program which has recently been applied by Cornell University libraries under a grant from the Council on Library Resources.[2] This long-range planning program engages a top management team in a carefully defined process for planning and problem solving in an organization. AMA designed the program for non-profit organizations and participated in the attempt to adapt it to the needs of the Cornell libraries. The experiment included training a small group of library managers in the techniques of objective formulation, strategy consideration, and the design of alternative courses of action. The program utilized AMA expertise and documents as a way of assisting the Cornell team in adapting their planning process to their requirements.

The use of non-library change strategies has the advantages of drawing on lessons learned elsewhere and expertise developed in other disciplines. While applications for operating libraries can be determined on an ad hoc basis there are, of course, problems because of the distinctive requirements of libraries in academic situations. These requirements frequently reduce the effectiveness, or at least the efficiency of these change processes.

The second category of strategies for changing libraries involves internally generated projects or programs. In the past, library leaders have scored impressive gains by the strength of individual accomplishment. Some more recent curent examples include: McGill University recently completed a self-study that resulted in a series of extensive organizational changes;[3] the University of Michigan has set up a planning committee that has worked over the last several months and is now using a series of twenty-two (22) task forces to consider problems and design short-range and long-range solutions to these problems;[4] and, UCLA completed a major reorganization as a result of a staff assisted study of organization and management patterns.[5]

These internally generated programs have recently received a boost by the creation of a cooperative clearinghouse of management systems and procedures at the Association of Research Libraries' Office of University Library Management Studies.[6] This clearinghouse is called the Systems and Procedures Exchange Center and is a device for gathering information and documentation on academic libraries' management programs and systems. Access to this documentation is provided via publications and services to other libraries interested in experimenting with those

methods and approaches. Over the course of the last 6 months, for example, the Systems and Procedures Exchange Center has created SPEC kits or packages of illustrative documents on the topics of:

- Staff Classification Systems
- Library Affirmative Action Programs
- The Organization of Personnel Offices
- Library Objectives
- Library Organization Charts
- Friends of the Library Committees

These materials are then used for the purpose of improving an individual institution's own approach to that topical area.

Within this category of internal strategies is a new technique now available to academic libraries called the Management Review and Analysis Program.[7] This program is an assisted self-study designed by the ARL Office of University Management Study and intended as a set of guidelines for a research library to use in conducting an internal assessment of its management practices in a comprehensive and systematic fashion. A study team in a participating library is organized to look at management activities in the areas of planning, policies, budget, management information, organization, leadership and supervision, staff development, personnel and communications. The result of these investigations is a report that analyzes and describes management practices as they currently operate in the library and makes suggestions for future courses of action that will improve the capability of the library to perform and provide service to its users. To date, 14 large academic and research libraries have participated in this program, and future additional operations are envisioned as applications for smaller university and college libraries.

III. THE INTENDED AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF INTRODUCING PLANNED CHANGE INTO A LIBRARY ORGANIZATION

The intent of introducing improved management processes to the library is to make better use of the enterprise's resources - human, material, and technological - to accomplish the library's programs and objectives. Library managers must be concerned with evaluating the results of their efforts at improving the planning, organization, leadership and operation of the libraries. Therefore, most of the institutions that have experimented with some of the change techniques noted above have carefully looked at the problems associated with these planned changes as well as the major benefits that have been secured.

While the documentation on the new approaches is rather limited, certain problems can be readily identified. For example, there is an enormous amount of staff time and energy required in any effort that involves the staff more directly in the processes of the enterprise. In these efforts of utilizing staff in defining and identifying problems, and the subsequent planning and implementing of changes, the time requirements are significant. Furthermore, there is frequently a considerable amount of staff resistance and staff cynicism as to the effect and the importance of these efforts. Most of the alternatives described above have to deal with these staff critics whose experience in a bureaucratic organization has suggested that these organizations are not easily changed.

There are, of course, major benefits secured in efforts of this nature. For example, frequently the university's view of the library is changed. The activity, enthusiasm, and dynamic nature of these processes

is observed by university administrators. Furthermore, there is frequently a direct effect on the calibre of services provided to users and this influences the university's view of the library.

A second major benefit concerns the improvement in staff/management relations as staff learns more about the complex and very difficult processes involved in managing an academic library. They understand, somewhat more, the constraints and challenges that incumbent managers are trying to deal with. Managers, on the otherhand get a clearer view of the capabilities and ideas of the organization's staff members. Furthermore, these managers are in the position of entertaining fresh new ideas and incorporating the ideas into their operation.

The third major benefit secured relates to concrete changes in library operations. Most of these programs have resulted in a number of ideas, recommendations, and actions that have been implemented and that have influenced the pattern of performance. Reports from the several libraries participating in both the management self-studies, the consultant studies, and in the AMA studies indicate that the changes would probably not have been suggested or implemented under other circumstances. Furthermore, these processes have been valuable in influencing the climate and capabilities of the organization involved.

The experimentation noted above leads to a consideration of key elements in these processes that are distinctive and may be viewed as an emerging philosophy of library organizational change.

IV. A PHILOSOPHY OF LIBRARY ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

While change is fast becoming an overworked and unclear term, it is apparent that academic libraries have to deal with the reality that the environment in which they perform will not remain the same. In the past, managers have tried to cope with changing events; in the future the emphasis must be on influencing the process of change. The challenge then is determining how we can learn from past efforts and apply these lessons to the way we manage libraries now and, parenthically, the way we develop new managers. Certainly, some lessons have already emerged from the experimental efforts noted above:

- That by developing the management capability of the library staff, there will be an improved environment for professional contributions;
- That there is value in having different institutions address their concerns in their own way assisted by current management techniques;
- That there is a need for libraries to develop analytic and management skills from within their own staffs rather than waiting for outside help;
- That libraries will profit most by developing their own team of experts that can guide the library in assessing their strengths and building on them in a continuing fashion;
- That there is a danger in resting on past accomplishments;
- That special efforts are needed to identify and develop new leaders.

On the basis of these observations and assumptions I would like to propose a philosophic framework that encompasses certain key concepts necessary for taking a more aggressive position toward influencing the change process.

1. Development and use of ideas and resources. A key element in the emergency of a philosophy of organizational change is the presence of individual and organizational curiosity about fresh ideas and new resources that are available to the library.

Individual institutional change is greatly facilitated if the experiences and the expertise from other experimentations can be applied to the needs of the institution. The projects noted above have this characteristic. All attempted to look at approaches used in the library field and, in addition, attempted to determine what was available from outside the field. Several projects employed experts or techniques from other professional enterprises. It is crucial that when a library tries to introduce change it begin by identifying and using the ideas and experiences that are available. This is particularly important in light of emerging technology and new applications of management concepts, as well as the swift pace of the changing environment.

In the past, access to ideas and experiences was largely by direct personal contact (i.e. conventions, telephone calls, or on-site visits) and a review of current literature. While these efforts should and will continue, a number of potential difficulties can deminish the value of these activities, including: expense, time required, limited perspective achieved, biased institutional evaluation of its experience, lack of comparison and evaluations, unavailability of concrete documentation, a focus

on rather minor housekeeping events, and inability to interpret and apply ideas from outside of the profession.

In the future, efforts must focus (1) on exploring developments in other enterprises and professions and applying these developments to libraries and (2) cooperating in the development of an improved body of knowledge concerning the management and operation of large academic libraries.

An example of a cooperative approach to sharing ideas and experiences in a formal and systematic fashion is the recently created ARL Systems and Procedures Exchange Center noted earlier. For the first time large research libraries are deliberately, and in a formal fashion contributing documentation on management activities and accomplishments to a central file which is in turn accessed by other libraries interested in experimenting with and improving their own approaches to those management activities.

The key aspects of this clearinghouse are the processes of: (1) surveying ARL member libraries on specific management techniques (e.g. performance appraisal methods, staff classification systems, or personnel policies); (2) securing information on current practices in terms of descriptive documentation (i.e. project reports, policy statements, illustrative materials); (3) analyzing the information and documentation; and (4) making the analysis and illustrative documentation available to the library community. The resulting files are available within two months of a survey and involve a series of publications and management services.

This is a development that is significant because of the amount of quality documentation that is being contributed and the willingness of libraries to capitalize upon it as they go about their own internal process of improvement and change.

2. Cooperative approaches to management improvement. Another key element in the proposed philosophic framework is the need for a new attitude toward the improvement of library management collectively. This new attitude relates to the management of research libraries in the aggregate as well as to cooperative ventures to improve individual library operations.

Management of research libraries in the aggregate refers to the working relationships among those major libraries that might be viewed as national research resources. Currently, these libraries are grouped within the Association of Research Libraries to identify and address problems of internal concern. In the future, new efforts must be initiated to strengthen these working relationships, to develop additional collective operational devices that will strengthen the individual library's performance potential, and to explore new methods of sharing the costs for providing the nation with access to the research resources required.

Another aspect of collective management relates to the operational problems shared in common by individual research libraries. These are issues such as: staff rights vs management rights, organizational accountability vs professional flexibility, the role of the library in the instructional and research processes of the university, clarification of the decision making processes, etc.

Examples of how libraries collectively explore these issues are available from the 14 libraries that have participated in the Management

Review and Analysis Program. The libraries worked in groups of three, five or six as they completed the self-study process. Thus during this effort of looking at their own strengths and weaknesses they have participated in a cooperative venture to explore and discuss other institutions' approaches to the same problems. Furthermore, as these groups of libraries have gone through the process, they have contributed working documents, suggestions and reports that allow subsequent participants to build on their experience and further refine and improve their processes.

These examples are significant because, if the profession expects to build its own distinctive management expertise and theory, it must in fact build on experiences and ideas generated through experimentation and cooperation. This can occur only if the means are available for a useful exchange and if the participants' attitudes are positive and open. This type of cooperative approach to management, which only a few years ago seemed to be an impossibility is now demonstrating that it allows greater growth for all involved.

3. Stage of development for organization. A third major consideration in the development of a philosophy for organizational change concerns the readiness of the organization. The methods used for introducing change must consider where the library is now in terms of growth, size, functions and accomplishments; and where the parent institution is going over the short and long range.

One aspect of this concerns staff competence and attitudes. Many library staff members possess extraordinary credentials in terms of years of experience, advanced degrees, subject and language specialities, and scholarly achievements. These same staff members, however, fre-

quently have not experienced a great deal of successful committee and group work. As these staffs move toward an enhanced academic status and a greater role in library policy making, enhanced interpersonal and intergroup skills are needed. The stage of advancement must be diagnosed and the change strategy adopted that will facilitate that development.

Other aspects that should be considered in understanding the stage of development for the organization include size; location - urban rural; top management composition, recently appointed or well-established; budget conditions; staff morale; and availability of managerial leadership. In particular, having an understanding of the challenges facing the organization in the future seems to be the key in appraising the stage of development for the library and the determination of an appropriate change strategy for that library.

In the operation of the Management Review and Analysis Program, for example, the range of accomplishments exhibited by the different participating institutions reflect these several characteristics. In some instances where library staffs are quite large and have achieved a certain degree of sophistication in management processes there is more of an effort to capitalize upon the program in terms of fundamental reorganization. In other instances where the libraries may have experienced a recent history of little change, the program focuses more on refining current activities and developing a new receptiveness and a new attitude on the part of the staff towards change. [11]

The signif cant point here is that the library needs to determine its stage of development and to gauge the environmental receptiveness to change; and on the basis of this assessment, to determine which method or strategy would be appropriate and most effective for the library. In addition, the application of a particular method must be done with a great

deal of interpretation so as to meet the distinctive requirements of that library at that point in its development.

4. The leadership requirements. In any strategy of directed change a fundamental requirement is top management leadership. While specific changes can be introduced by a dissatisfied staff, a new university president, or a reduced budget, only a library director can initiate a long range deliberate effort to develop a flexible organization that anticipates and responds to a fluid environment.

It is abundantly clear that the primary determinant of the success of any change strategy is the competence and committment of library management leaders. This is a fact of life that cannot be overcome by introducing new structures or new processes. Library administrators need: to initiate new activities, to understand the requirements of the organization and the capabilities of their staff, and to perform in an advisory and catalytic role in introducing change. All the examples noted earlier started with this basic ingredient of top management leadership and built upon it as a way of securing substantive change in these organizations.

In the future, the demanding nature of academic libraries will result in new leadership requirements for the library managers. These new leaders will need: a talent for consensus, a tolerance for ambiguity and an enjoyment of complexities. Increasingly, these managers will act to accelerate change, to make choices others won't make, to bring about cooperation in the midst of disagreement and to employ skillfully the array of experts needed to operate libraries.

What emerges from these current experiments is that the library director will operate as a broker of decisions in an open consultative fashion. It is imperative that the profession encourage the development of library managers who perform as organizational leaders and innovators.

5. Process of staff involvement. The final key ingredient in the philosophy of library organizational change concerns the need for effective staff involvement. The day has passed where one person is the primary executor of library decisions and functions. This is due in part to practical considerations: the dimension of the enterprises and the problems makes one person rule impossible. From a conceptual point of view, however, it is apparent that staff involvement in a carefully defined decision making, policy making, or change strategy leads to better decisions, better policies and changes that are implemented. This is due in part to the quality of ideas generated in such a climate and in part to the staff committment to solutions that they had a share in designing.

It is a demonstrated reality that a properly conceived group of non-experts (i.e. non-management experts) can develop solutions to complex problems that approach the quality of expert judgements.[12] More importantly, it doesn't matter if the management consultant or the library director has a great idea - it is not going to work if the staff does not want it to work.

The several management projects noted earlier all have this common characteristic of trying to utilize staff expertise and skills more effectively in this very complex task of improving the capabilities of the organization. In this setting libraries are looking for new methods of working together, new interpersonal relationships, a new sense of individual relationships to the organization, a clear delineation of organizational tasks and functions, more open and direct confrontations with organizational problems, and new avenues for obtaining, processing

and acting on information.

These approaches are based on the assumption that participants share the primary objective of improving the library. Staff members are expected to act as professional partners in the management process and as partners will need to act in a responsible, contributory fashion. Effective staff involvement then is something much more ambitious than participation for participations sake. It is aimed at improving the performance potential of the library and is secured in a planned strategic fashion.

V. CONCLUSION

As the result of these attempts to innovate and improve library management, certain observations and judgments can be made. It has been proven first, that top management leadership must support and contribute directly to any process of change. Second, that library staff can contribute to a developing self-awareness that leads to a stronger library program and organization. Third, that libraries need to secure additional means of identifying problems, analyzing them and developing solutions. Fourth, that the process of management improvement while influencing the organization does not in fact destroy the delicate fiber of the library. Fifth, in this process of analysis and management innovation a number of good new ideas are generated that can be used by the library as it goes forward in the process of responding to environmental requirements. Finally, participants in these processes have found that members of organization staff, middle management and top management find can cooperate in a combined process of self-revitalization and organizationa. renewal.

FOOTNOTES

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